SPEECH
OF
MR. WEBSTER,
AT THE
CELEBRATION
OF THE
NEW YORK NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY
December 23, 1850

Dar
E426
W378

UNIVERSITY
OF PITTSBURGH
LIBRARY

THIS BOOK PRESENTED BY

The Buhl Foundation

Webster Pamphlet

SPEECH

OF

# MR. WEBSTER,

AT

THE CELEBRATION

OF THE

# NEW YORK NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY,

DECEMBER 23, 1850.

WASHINGTON:
PRINTED BY GIDEON AND CO.
1851.

Dar
E426
W378

# SPEECH.

Mr. GRINNELL then asked attention to a toast which was not on the catalogue, but which he thought every one would vote ought to be placed there forthwith. He gave—

"THE CONSTITUTION AND THE UNION, AND THEIR CHIEF DEFENDER."

This sentiment was received with great applause; and when Mr. WEBSTER rose to respond to it, he was greeted with the most prolonged and tumultuous cheers. When the applause had subsided, he spoke as follows:

*Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the New York New England Society:*

Ye sons of New England! Ye brethren of the kindred tie! I have come hither to-night, not without some inconvenience, that I might behold a congregation whose faces bear lineaments of a New England origin, and whose hearts beat with full New England pulsations. [Cheers.] I willingly make the sacrifice. I am here, to meet this assembly of the great offshoot of the Pilgrim Society of Massachusetts, the Pilgrim Society of New York. And, gentlemen, I shall begin what I have to say, which is but little, by tendering to you my thanks for the invitation extended to me, and by wishing you, one and all, every kind of happiness and prosperity.

Gentlemen, this has been a stormy, a cold, a boisterous and inclement day. The winds have been harsh, the skies have been severe; and if we had no houses over our heads; if we had no shelter against this howling and freezing tempest; if we were

wan and worn out; if half of us were sick and tired, and ready to descend into the grave; if we were on the bleak coast of Plymouth, houseless, homeless, with nothing over our heads but the Heavens, and that God who sits above the Heavens; if we had distressed wives on our arms, and hungry and shivering children clinging to our skirts, we should see something, and feel something, of that scene, which, in the providence of God, was enacted at Plymouth on the 22d of December, 1620.

Thanks to Almighty God, who from that distressed, early condition of our fathers, has raised us to a height of prosperity and of happiness, which they neither enjoyed, nor could have anticipated! We have learned much of them; they could have foreseen little of us. Would to God, my friends, would to God, that when we carry our affections and our recollections back to that period, we could arm ourselves with something of the stern virtues which supported them, in that hour of peril, and exposure, and suffering. Would to God that we possessed that unconqueable resolution, stronger than bars of brass or iron, which nerved their hearts; that patience, "sovereign o'er transmuted ill," and, above all, that faith, that Religious faith, which, with eyes fast fixed upon Heaven, tramples all things earthly beneath her triumphant feet! [Applause.]

Gentlemen, the scenes of this world change. What our ancestors saw and felt, we shall not see nor feel. What they achieved, it is denied to us even to attempt. The severer duties of life, requiring the exercise of the stern and unbending virtues, were theirs. They were called upon for the exhibition of those austere qualities, which, before they came to the western wilderness, had made them what they were. Things have changed. In the progress of society, the fashions, the habits of life, and all its conditions, have changed. Their rigid sentiments, and their tenets, apparently harsh and exclusive, we are not called on, in every respect, to imitate or commend; or rather to imitate, for we should commend them always, when we consider that state

of society in which they had been adopted, and in which they seemed necessary. Our fathers had that religious sentiment, that trust in Providence, that determination to do right, and to seek, through every degree of toil and suffering, the honor of God, and the preservation of their liberties, which we shall do well to cherish, to imitate, and to equal, so far as God may enable us. It may be true, and it is true, that in the progress of society the milder virtues have come to belong more especially to our day and our condition. The Pilgrims had been great sufferers from intolerance; it was not unnatural that their own faith and practice, as a consequence, should become somewhat intolerant. This is the common infirmity of human nature. Man retaliates on man. It is to be hoped, however, that the greater spread of the benignant principles of religion, and of the divine charity of christianity, has, to some extent, improved the sentiments which prevailed in the world at that time. No doubt the "first comers," as they were called, were attached to their own forms of public worship, and to their own particular and strongly cherished religious sentiments. No doubt they esteemed those sentiments, and the observances which they practised, to be absolutely binding on all, by the authority of the word of God. It is true, I think, in the general advancement of human intelligence, that we find what they do not seem to have found, that a greater toleration of religious opinion, a more friendly feeling towards all who profess reverence for God, and obedience to his commands, is not inconsistent with the great and fundamental principles of religion. might rather say is, itself, one of those fundamental principles. So we see in our day, I think, without any departure from the essential principles of our fathers, a more enlarged and comprehensive Christian philanthropy. It seems to be the American destiny, the mission which God has entrusted to us here on this shore of the Atlantic, the great conception and the great duty to which we are born, to show that all sects, and all denominations, professing reverence for the authority of the Author of our

being, and belief in his Revelations, may be safely tolerated without prejudice either to our religion or to our liberties. [Cheers.]

We are Protestants, generally speaking; but you all know that there presides at the head of the Supreme Judicature of the United States a Roman Catholic; and no man, I suppose, through the whole United States, imagines that the judicature of the country is less safe, that the administration of public justice is less respectable or less secure, because the Chief Justice of the United States has been, and is, an ardent adherent to that religion. And so it is in every department of society amongst us. In both Houses of Congress, in all public offices, and all public affairs, we proceed on the idea that a man's religious belief is a matter above human law; that it is a question to be settled between him and his Maker, because he is responsible to none but his Maker for adopting or rejecting revealed truth. And here is the great distinction which is sometimes overlooked, and which I am afraid is now too often overlooked, in this land, the glorious inheritance of the sons of the Pilgrims. Men, for their religious sentiments, are accountable to God, and to God only. Religion is both a communication and a tie between man and his Maker; and to his own master every man standeth or falleth. But when men come together in society, establish social relations, and form governments for the protection of the rights of all, then it is indispensable that this right of private judgment should in some measure be relinquished and made subservient to the judgment of the whole. Religion may exist while every man is left responsible only to God. Society, civil rule, the civil state, cannot exist, while every man is responsible to nobody and to nothing but to his own opinion. And our New England ancestors understood all this quite well. Gentlemen, there is the "*Constitution*" which was adopted on board the Mayflower in November, 1620, while that barque of immortal memory was riding at anchor in the harbor of Cape Cod. What is it? Its authors honored God; they professed to obey all his commandments, and to live

ever and in all things in his obedience. But they say, nevertheless, that for the establishment of a civil polity, for the greater security and preservation of their civil rights and liberties, they *agree* that the laws and ordinances, and I am glad they put in the word "*constitutions*," invoking the name of the Deity on their resolution; they say, that these laws and ordinances, and *constitutions*, which may be established by those they should appoint to enact them, they, in all due submission and obedience, will support.

This constitution is not long. I will read it. It invokes a *religious* sanction and the authority of God on their *civil* obligations; for it was no doctrine of theirs that civil obedience was a mere matter of expediency. Here it is:

"In the name of God, Amen: We, whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord, King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, and Defender of the Faith, &c., having undertaken, for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the heathen parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and of one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid, and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience."

The right of private judgment in matters between the Creator and himself, and submission and obedience to the will of the whole, upon whatsoever respects civil polity and the administration of such affairs as concerned the colony about to be established, they regarded as entirely consistent; and the common sense of mankind, lettered and unlettered, every where establishes and confirms this sentiment. Indeed, all must see, that it is the very ligament, the very tie, which connects man to man, in the social system; and these sentiments are embodied in that constitution. Gentlemen, discourse on this topic might be enlarged, but I pass from it.

Gentlemen, we are now two hundred and thirty years from that great event. There is the *Mayflower*, (pointing to a small figure of a ship, in the form of confectionary, that stood before him.)

There is a little resemblance, but a correct one, of the *Mayflower*. Sons of New England! there was in ancient times a ship that carried Jason to the acquisition of the Golden Fleece. There was a flag-ship at the battle of Actium which made Augustus Cæsar master of the world. In modern times, there have been flag-ships which have carried Hawkes, and Howe, and Nelson on the other continent, and Hull, and Decatur, and Stewart, on this, to triumph. What are they all; what are they *all*, in the chance of remembrance among men, to that little barque, the *Mayflower*, which reached these shores on the 22d day of December, 1620. Yes, brethren of New England, yes! that Mayflower was a flower destined to be of perpetual bloom! [Cheers.] Its verdure will stand the sultry blasts of summer, and the chilling winds of autumn. It will defy winter; it will defy all climate, and all time, and will continue to spread its petals to the world, and to exhale an ever living odor and fragrance to the last syllable of recorded time. [Cheers.]

Gentlemen, brethren, ye of New England! whom I have come some hundreds of miles to meet this night, let me present to you one of the most distinguished of those personages who came hither on the deck of the Mayflower. Let me fancy that I now see Elder Wm. Brewster entering the door at the further end of this hall. A tall and erect figure, of plain dress, of no elegance of manner beyond a respectful bow, mild and cheerful, but of no merriment that reaches beyond a smile. Let me suppose that his image stood now before us, or that it was looking in upon this assembly.

"Are ye, are ye," he would say, with a voice of exultation, and yet softened with melancholy, "Are ye our children? Does "this scene of refinement, of elegance, of riches, of luxury, does "all this come from our labors? Is this magnificent city, the like "of which we never saw nor heard of on either continent, is this "but an offshoot from Plymouth rock?

" . . . . . Quis jam locus . . . .
"Quæ regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?

"Is this one part of the great reward, for which my brethren "and myself endured lives of toil and of hardship? We had "faith and hope. God granted us the spirit to look forward, and "we did look forward. But this scene we never anticipated. "Our hopes were on another life. Of earthly gratifications we "tasted little; for human honors we had little expectation. Our "bones lie on the hill in Plymouth church-yard, obscure, un- "marked, *secreted* to preserve our graves from the knowledge of "savage foes .No stone tells where we lie. And yet, let me say "to you, who are our descendants, who possess this glorious "country, and all it contains, who enjoy this hour of prosperity, "and the thousand blessings showered upon it by the God of "your fathers, we envy you not; we reproach you not. Be "rich, be prosperous, be enlightened. Live in pleasure, if such "be your allotment on earth; but live, also, always to God and to "duty. Spread yourselves and your children over the conti- "nent; accomplish the whole of your great destiny; and if so "be, that through the whole you carry Puritan hearts with you; "if you still cherish an undying love of civil and religious liberty, "and mean to enjoy them yourselves, and are willing to shed "your heart's blood to transmit them to your posterity, then are "you worthy descendants of Carver and Allerton and Bradford, "and the rest of those who landed from stormy seas on the rock "of Plymouth." [Loud and prolonged cheers.]

Gentlemen, that little vessel, on the 22d of December, 1620, made her safe landing on the shore of Plymouth. She had been tossed on a tempestuous ocean; she approached the New England coast under circumstances of great distress and trouble; yet amidst all the disasters of her voyage, she accomplished her end, and she placed the feet of a hundred precious souls on the shore of the New World.

Gentlemen, let her be considered this night as an emblem of New England, as New England now is. New England is a ship, staunch, strong, well-built, and particularly well-manned. She

may be occasionally thrown into the trough of the sea, by the violence of winds and waves, and may *wallow* there for a time; but, depend upon it, she will right herself. She will, ere long, *come round to the wind, and will obey her helm.* [Cheers and applause.]

We have hardly begun, my brethren, to realize the vast importance, on human society, and on the history and happiness of the world, of the voyage of that little vessel which brought the love of civil and religious liberty hither, and the Bible, the word of God, for the instruction of the future generations of men. We have hardly begun to realize the consequences of that voyage. Heretofore the extension of our race, following our New England ancestry, has crept along the shore. But now the race has extended. It has crossed the continent. It has not only transcended the Alleghany, but has capped the Rocky Mountains. It is now upon the shores of the Pacific; and on this day, or, if not on this day, then this day twelvemonth, descendants of New England will there celebrate the landing——

A Voice. "To-day; they celebrate to-day."

Mr. Webster. God bless them! Here's to the health and success of the California Society of Pilgrims assembled on the shores of the Pacific. [Prolonged applause.] And it shall yet go hard, if the three hundred millions of people of China—if they are intelligent enough to understand any thing—shall not one day hear and know something of the Rock of Plymouth too! [Laughter and cheers.]

But, gentlemen, I am trespassing too long on your time. [Cries of No, no! Go on!] I am taking too much of what belongs to others. My voice is neither a new voice, nor is it the voice of a young man. It has been heard before in this place, and the most that I have thought or felt concerning New England history and New England principles, has been before, in the course of my life, said here or elsewhere.

Your sentiment, Mr. President, which called me up before this meeting, is of a larger and more comprehensive nature. It

speaks of the Constitution under which we live; of the Union, which for sixty years has been over us, and made us associates, fellow-citizens of those who settled at Yorktown and the mouth of the Mississippi and their descendants, and now, at last, of those who have come from all corners of the earth and assembled in California. I confess I have had my doubts whether the republican system under which we live could be so vastly extended without danger of dissolution. Thus far, I willingly admit, my apprehensions have not been realized. The distance is immense; the intervening country is vast. But the principle on which our Government is established, the representative system, seems to be indefinitely expansive; and wherever it does extend, it seems to create a strong attachment to the Union and the Constitution that protects it. I believe California and New Mexico have had new life inspired into all their people. They consider themselves subjects of a new being, a new creation, a new existence. They are not the men they thought themselves to be, now that they find they are members of this great Government, and hailed as citizens of the United States of America. I hope, in the providence of God, as this system of States and representative governments shall extend, that it will be strengthened. In some respects the tendency is to strengthen it. Local agitations will disturb it less. If there has been on the Atlantic coast, somewhere south of the Potomac—and I will not define further where it is—if there has been dissatisfaction, that dissatisfaction has not been felt in California; it has not been felt that side the Rocky Mountains. It is a *localism*, and I am one of those who believe that our system of government is not to be destroyed by *localisms*, North or South! [Cheers.] No; we have our private opinions, State prejudices, local ideas; but over all, submerging all, *drowning* all, is that great sentiment, that always, and nevertheless, *we are all Americans*. It is as Americans that we are known, the whole world over. Who asks what State you are from, in Europe, or in Africa, or in Asia? Is he an American—is he of us? Does

he belong to the flag of the country? Does that flag protect him? Does he rest under the eagle and the stars and stripes? If he does, if he is, all else is subordinate and worthy of but little concern. [Cheers.]

Now it is our duty, while we live on the earth, to cherish this sentiment, to make it prevail over the whole country, even if that country should spread over the whole continent. It is our duty to carry English principles—I mean, sir, (said Mr. WEBSTER turning to Sir HENRY BULWER,) Anglo-Saxon *American* principles, over the whole continent—the great principles of Magna Charta, of the English revolution, and especially of the American Revolution, and of the English language. Our children will hear Shakspeare and Milton recited on the shores of the Pacific. Nay, before that, American ideas, which are essentially and originally English ideas, will penetrate the Mexican—the Spanish mind; and Mexicans and Spaniards will thank God that they have been brought to know something of civil liberty, of the trial by jury, and of security for personal rights.

As for the rest, let us take courage. The day-spring from on high has visited us; the country has been called back, to conscience and to duty. *There is no longer imminent danger of dissolution in these United States.* [Loud and repeated cheers. We shall live, and not die. We shall live as united Americans; and those who have supposed that they could sever us, that they could rend one American heart from another, and that speculation and hypothesis, that secession and metaphysics, could tear us asunder, will find themselves dreadfully mistaken. [Cheers.]

Let the mind of the sober American people remain sober. Let it not inflame itself. Let it do justice to all. And the truest course, and the surest course, to disappoint those who meditate disunion, is just to leave them to themselves, and see what they can make of it. No, gentlemen; the time for meditated secession is past. Americans, North and South, will be hereafter more and more united. There is a sternness and severity in the pub-

lic mind lately aroused. I believe that, North and South, there has been, in the last year, a renovation of public sentiment, an animated revival of the spirit of Union, and, more than all, of attachment to the Constitution, regarding it as indispensably necessary; and if we would preserve our nationality, it is indispensable that the spirit of devotion should be still more largely increased. And who doubts it? If we give up that Constitution, what are we? You are a Manhattan man; I am a Boston man. Another is a Connecticut, and another a Rhode Island man. Is it not a great deal better, standing hand to hand, and clasping hands, that we should remain as we have been for sixty years—citizens of the same country, members of the same Government, united all—united now and united forever? *That we shall be, gentlemen.* There have been difficulties, contentions, controversies—angry controversies; but I tell you that, in my judgment,

> ——— "those opposed eyes,
> Which, like the meteors of a troubled heaven,
> All of one nature, of one substance bred,
> Did lately meet in th' intestine shock,
> Shall now, in mutual well-beseeming ranks,
> MARCH ALL ONE WAY."

Mr. WEBSTER, on closing, was greeted with the most hearty, prolonged, and tumultuous applause.